



National Juvenile Justice Network

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TESTIMONY FROM SARAH BRYER
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TO THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
IN THE CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY
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OPPOSING H.B. 6386 AN ACT DELAYING IMPLEMENTATION OF LEGISLATION RAISING
THE AGE OF JUVENILE JURISDICTION

Good afternoon, Members of the Committee, Representative Lawlor and Senator MacDonald, thank you for letting me address you today.

I'm Sarah Bryer, the director of the National Juvenile Justice Network or NJJN. NJJN is an organization devoted to enhancing the capacity of statewide juvenile justice coalitions to advocate for the fair, equitable and developmentally appropriate adjudication and treatment for all children, youth and families involved in the juvenile justice system. NJJN has been in existence since 2005 and currently comprises 37 members in 31 states.

I wanted to bring a national voice to this discussion about what is happening in Connecticut. When Connecticut lowered its age of jurisdiction, the rest of the country caught its breath and applauded. In that moment, Connecticut set itself apart as a true leader in juvenile justice reform. Legislators, administrators, and advocates all across the country now view Connecticut as the example to follow.

At last count, in thirteen separate states, there are efforts to bring youth back to the juvenile court. Either by changing the age of juvenile court jurisdiction or by repealing and amending transfer laws, states are acknowledging that both science and public safety recommend that youth be retained within the juvenile court until at least eighteen years of age.

There is now an irrefutable body of research that tells us what parents knew all along, that a teenager's brain is not fully developed. While teens may have the intellectual capacity of adults, they are much more susceptible to peer pressure, make extremely poor decisions in contexts of high emotion and will actively seek to engage in risky behavior. The good news is that they grow out of this stage as their brains mature. Putting them in adult criminal justice system interferes with that process, because it is not a place where young people get the tools they need to mature. Holding them accountable in the juvenile system is a far better way to develop productive citizens.

The latest research from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the U.S. Department of Justice confirms this result. This research has now shown that youth who are transferred into the adult system are more likely to recidivate, and to recidivate more quickly, than youth who were handled within the juvenile justice system.

The state of Connecticut has taken the lead in following the science in their treatment of youth who have broken the law. By raising its age of juvenile court jurisdiction and making an affirmative statement that children should be treated as such, Connecticut has shown the path of reform for states around the country.

- And the country has indeed looked to Connecticut as the leader on this issue. Since ~~Connecticut began the process of raising its age of jurisdiction, thirteen other states have also engaged in similar processes to bring more youth into the juvenile court.~~
- **Illinois** just put 17-year-old misdemeanor offenders back into the juvenile court and created a task force to study the impact of bringing back the 17-year-old offenders.
- **Indiana and Virginia** changed their once an adult always and adult laws.
- **North Carolina** created and funded a government commission to study changing the age of jurisdiction to bring 16- and 17-year-olds back into the juvenile court.
- A governor's commission in **Wisconsin** recommended returning 17-year-olds to juvenile court jurisdiction.
- The **Vermont** governor's advisory group commissioned a study to look at the impact of raising the age of jurisdiction
- **Rhode Island** lowered its age of jurisdiction, thinking that it would save money, and within months realized that in fact it would cost the state more and be detrimental to public safety and quickly repealed the new law.

Meanwhile, parents, youth, and engaged citizens across the country have been inspired by Connecticut's example and have begun movements to repeal transfer laws and raise the age of jurisdiction. In **Oregon, Arizona, Virginia, Ohio, and Washington, DC** citizens are enthusiastically engaged in looking at how to repeal or amend transfer laws. And citizens in **New Hampshire** are looking to change age of jurisdiction and bring back 17-year-olds.

All of us on a national level and across the country are watching Connecticut closely now. What you do already has and will continue to have an impact far beyond the boundaries of your state.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to talk with you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.